

SWP Small Wins
Planning



Legalizing Mobile Dwellings

*A guide for expanding a unique
affordable housing option in your city*

June 2022

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PSU Masters of Urban and Regional Planning Workshop 2022

Small Wins Planning in partnership with the City of Wood Village

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SWP



1. Executive Summary

In much of the United States, housing options are limited while costs rise. The purpose of this report is to analyze the utility and functionality of mobile dwellings as an interim housing option to provide shelter and basic living needs on private residential lots. The policy context presented below for permitting mobile dwellings as part of the solution for growing issues of housing affordability focuses on Oregon and the Portland Metro region, but could be applicable in a variety of urban contexts.



Photos: Camping St Hilaire, Bluegrass Meadows, PAD Tiny Houses

While missing middle housing and ADUs have received much attention in recent years as a solution for addressing housing affordability, mobile dwellings have not. Mobile dwellings are a uniquely affordable housing option because they are not subject to the same building code standards as traditional dwelling units, such as ADUs or other middle housing options. In 2016, Fresno, California was the first to adopt code legalizing mobile dwellings and has only received 4 permit applications. All other municipalities that adopted similar code received few applications as well. While many people currently live in mobile dwellings, either by choice or as a last resort, the amount of actual mobile dwelling permits issued by municipalities is miniscule due to 1) the recent adoption of such policies, 2) the lack of public awareness, and 3) the burdensome regulations associated with permittal.

People are already living in unpermitted mobile dwellings as interim housing. Policymakers need to respond to obvious demand for this housing type and provide safe, legal ways for people to utilize this flexible, affordable alternative.

Mobile Dwellings have many names! They can also be referred to as:

- Tiny Home on Wheels (THOW)
- Recreational Vehicles (RVs)
- Park Model RVs
- Movable Tiny Houses (MTH)
- Mobile Dwelling Units

This report is based on a case study conducted in Wood Village, Oregon. Some of the key lessons learned from Wood Village include the complexities of passing such code, how to assuage stakeholder and public concerns, and timeframe considerations. These lessons learned from Wood Village, along with research from other municipalities and stakeholders, have been synthesized into model code - available in this report- to planners and policymakers for use in their communities. Increased awareness about mobile dwelling code will result in higher levels of usage and adoption, ultimately creating more affordable and equitable communities.

The recommendations and model code in this report are produced by Small Wins Planning, a Portland State University (PSU) final workshop project for the Masters of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP). The name Small Wins Planning was chosen because there is no singular solution to the current housing crisis, instead, a variety of actions are necessary. We need increased housing supply (at market rate and affordable levels), increased rental vouchers, equity-focused programming, progressive zoning policy, and immediate interim housing options, which include mobile dwellings.

Key Code Recommendations:

- **Require utility hookups** for water, sewage, and electrical (allowing for exceptions with sewage for composting toilets and with electricity for alternative energies)
- **Require a stable pad** on which to place the mobile dwelling unit
- **No design reviews** in order to expedite the permitting process for immediate housing needs

Key Implementation Recommendations:

- **Build coalitions** in support of mobile dwellings
- Engage the public in smaller **focus groups** to generate representative feedback from residents and key stakeholders
- Advocate for the **simplest, most flexible** code for the jurisdiction
- **Highlight successes** of similar codes, including how no previously enacted codes have received negative public feedback post-adoption



Photo: Tiny House Marketplace

2. Background and Context

In the face of growing housing affordability crises, planners and policymakers are searching for creative solutions to rapidly increase access to housing in order to combat this multifaceted issue. Allowing mobile dwellings on residential lots has been one such solution explored primarily on the West Coast. This report is the result of background research and code updates related to mobile dwellings created by Small Wins Planning for the city of Wood Village, Oregon, a small municipality in the greater Portland metro region.

The term “mobile dwelling” refers to **Tiny Homes on Wheels** (THOWs) and **Recreational Vehicles** (RVs). While mobile dwellings are not currently required to meet specific standards or building code, they share common characteristics of providing small habitable spaces which include basic functional areas used for shelter. Additionally, they have a trailer or chassis, and are able to be towed or have motive power. Mobile dwellings are often parked on pads, but do not require a foundation. Mobile dwellings are a flexible, affordable option for interim housing.

This report uses Oregon to frame the broader national housing crisis and details affordability and policy considerations to allow mobile dwellings as habitable space on residential lots.

Housing affordability and systemic racism

“Exclusionary zoning laws place restrictions on the types of homes that can be built in a particular neighborhood. Common examples include minimum lot size requirements, minimum square footage requirements, prohibitions on multi-family homes, and limits on the height of buildings... In the subsequent decades, some zoning laws have been used to discriminate against people of color and to maintain property prices in suburban and, more recently, urban neighborhoods.”

-White House Report: “Exclusionary Zoning: Its Effect on Racial Discrimination in the Housing Market.”¹⁴



Photo: Tiny Tranquility

Housing Crisis in the U.S. and Oregon

Across the U.S., communities are facing crises finding and buying affordable housing. These present crises have many interconnected causes, including historic underproduction, racially motivated exclusionary zoning practices, rapid growth in home prices over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, a backlog of upgrades needed to maintain the quality of affordable housing units, increasing wealth and income inequality, and increasing rates of chronic homelessness.^{1,2,3,4} Oregon and the Portland metro area are no exceptions to this trend, as a number of demographic, housing, and economic indicators demonstrate:

Oregon's **POPULATION** is growing:⁵

4.2 million in 2020

5.2 million in 2045

Especially in the **PORTLAND** area:⁶

2.4 million in 2015

3.5 million in 2060

VACANCY RATES are shrinking statewide:⁷

9.7% in 2014

8.2% in 2020

And in **MULTNOMAH COUNTY**:⁸

8.2% in 2021

5.9% in 2022

60,000 Units

Recent analyses suggest a **shortage of nearly 60,000 housing units** in the Portland Metro area resulting from historic underproduction.¹⁰

5,228 People

The January 2022 point-in-time count found **5,228 people** who met HUD's definition of homelessness.¹¹

29,775 Units

Multnomah County estimates a **current shortage of 29,775 affordable** housing units.⁹

22.1%

HUD found a 22.1% rise in the number of **people reported as unsheltered** in the county during the last two years.¹³

Policy Background

A number of cities and states have made significant efforts to allow more density and housing types in formerly single-family zones in recent years, including Minneapolis, California, and Oregon, under the umbrella term “Missing Middle Housing.” In Oregon, House Bill 2001, from the 2019 legislative session, mandated cities to allow duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, cottage clusters, and townhouses in residential areas previously zoned exclusively for single-family units. While these changes are important and necessary, the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) “expects the transformation of housing choices to be gradual.”¹⁸ However, issues of affordability and homelessness demand innovative solutions that can be implemented more quickly.



One solution that has existed for decades but that has not yet received adequate policy consideration is formalizing and scaling up opportunities for housing in mobile dwellings.¹⁹ While missing middle housing and ADUs have received much attention in recent years as a solution for addressing housing affordability, mobile dwellings have not received the same level of attention as a policy option.



Why Mobile Dwellings?

Mobile dwellings provide the cheapest and fastest opportunity to create flexible and affordable infill housing units. Mobile dwellings open opportunities for low-cost housing for many people: students returning from college, elderly parents, children or people with disabilities who want independence as they age, etc. These units can also provide income for homeowners, and they can be installed or built more quickly and cheaply than other housing.

Mobile dwellings can help address many important housing equity issues around access to housing, particularly for renters and marginalized populations. Across the country, around 40 percent of renters are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities. In many rental markets, even traditionally middle-class jobs do not pay enough for residents to avoid being housing cost burdened.

Figure 1. Renters and Homeowners by Race/Ethnicity and Household Income, 2019

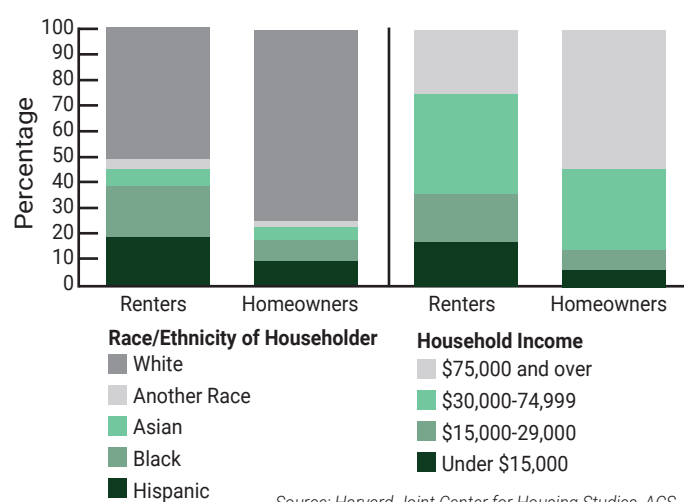
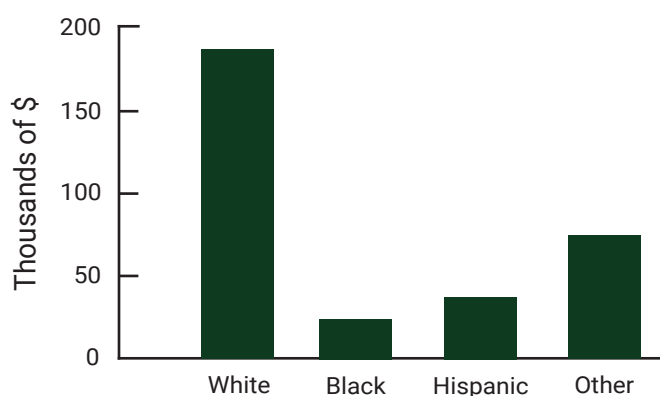


Figure 2. Median Net Worth by Race of Householder, 2019



Nationally, rental households are more likely to be households of color and have fewer people per household. On average, renters have lower incomes than homeowners (Figure 1). Low-cost rental opportunities provide more options for traditionally marginalized groups. Smaller units also provide opportunities for the increasing share of households without children and for the increasing share of older-households projected to need more supportive and smaller housing options in the years to come.²⁰ Furthermore, mobile dwellings present a relatively inexpensive investment opportunity for added income for homeowners who may not otherwise be able to afford more expensive ADU projects.

Cost of Mobile Dwellings

Figure 3. Costs of ADU and Mobile Dwelling Development

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	\$150,000 - \$500,000 ^{21, 22}	
Tiny Home on Wheels	\$15,000-\$22,000 for pad and hookups ²³ \$30,000-\$60,000 for pre-built THOW ²⁴ Total: \$45,000-\$82,000	
RV	\$15,000-\$22,000 for pad and hookups ²³ \$10,000-\$30,000 for used/new RV ²⁵ Total: \$25,000-\$52,000	

Sources: Dweller, Kol Peterson, Oregon Mobile Dwellings Policy Workgroup, Home Advisor

Key factors in the relative affordability of mobile dwellings include:

- Onsite and offsite building capacity and affordable second hand purchase
- No requirement for building inspection
- Flexibility in construction with no building codes
- Ties into water and sewer lines from the existing house with no requirement for separate connections to the street, minimizing System Development Charges (SDCs)
- No foundation required
- No financial tie to the land

“This housing type is unsubsidized, market-rate, and ultra-affordable housing stock. This ‘ultra-affordability’ is because there’s no land cost associated with these dwellings and because the dwellings are extraordinarily inexpensive relative to conventional housing structures, such as primary homes or ADUs.”

- Kol Peterson

Kol Peterson is an ADU expert based in Portland, Oregon. Kol helped catalyze the exponential growth of ADUs in Portland over the last decade through ADU advocacy, education, consulting, policy work, and entrepreneurship. He is one of the leading advocates for tiny homes on wheels nationally.

Small Wins Planning conducted interviews with planners and city staff in eight jurisdictions in Oregon and California that have zoning codes allowing mobile dwellings in residential zones.

PORTLAND

Only requires a water connection, and was adopted as a part of the “Shelter to Housing Continuum” package.

BEND

The city plans to include THOW and RV legislation under the larger umbrella of a code update allowing various types of shelter housing, camping, and other “hardship housing.”

PLACER COUNTY

Included THOW legislation as a response to lack of workforce housing in tourism and second-home areas.

OAKLAND

Allows clusters of tiny homes in “villages” and allows THOWs in front yards.

FRESNO

If the entrance is visible from the street, architectural consistency standards apply.

SAN LUIS OBISPO

No utility hookups are required.

OJAI

Units must be registered with the California DMV.

LOS ANGELES

Strict design requirements apply.

Figure 4. Map of Jurisdictions Researched



Figure 5. Timeline of Code Adoption

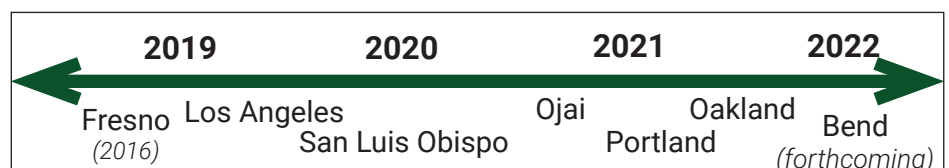


Figure 6. Table of THOW/RV Code in Other Municipalities

	Terminology	Administrative	Utility Hookups Required	Location/ Massing/ Setbacks	Pad/ Foundation	Size	Screening/ Design	Amount Permitted
Portland, OR	"Occupied Recreational Vehicle"	Only a plumbing permit required. Not permitted on undeveloped lots and does not count toward residential density	Water Electrical	Behind the front facade of the primary house and at least 5 feet from the primary dwelling	It must be parked on a paved surface if it has a motor, the occupied recreational vehicle must remain on wheels	None	None	No record
Fresno, CA	"Independent Living Facility"	\$1,697 permit fee. Must meet ANSI standards and be registered with the CA DMV	Water Sewer	Behind the primary dwelling unit. Applicable zone district height, setbacks, and lot coverage apply	Concrete pad with grading permit required	Minimum 100 sf of living space. Maximum floor area: 440 square feet	"Designed to look like a conventional building structure" Wheels and undercarriage must be skirted. If the entrance is visible from the street, architectural consistency standards apply	0
Ojai, CA	"Moveable tiny house" and is considered a residential dwelling unit	No fees on accessory units (aside from permit discounts for second units). Must be registered with the CA DMV. Applicant may obtain a separate address	Water Sewer Electrical	Applicable zone district height, setbacks, and lot coverage apply	If the wheels are removed must meet state approved foundation systems for manufactured housing. If the wheels are not removed, must be on a concrete, paved, or compacted gravel surface	Minimum 100 ft sq living space. Max floor area of 440 sf	Designed to look like a conventional building structure. Undercarriage must be skirted and not visible	0
San Luis Obispo, CA	"Moveable tiny house"	Must meet ANSI standards	None	Located toward the rear of the property. Applicable zone district height, setbacks, and lot coverage apply	Concrete, paved, or compacted gravel	Maximum Size-400 sf.	Designed to look like a conventional building structure	4

Figure 6. Table of THOW/RV Code in Other Municipalities (continued)

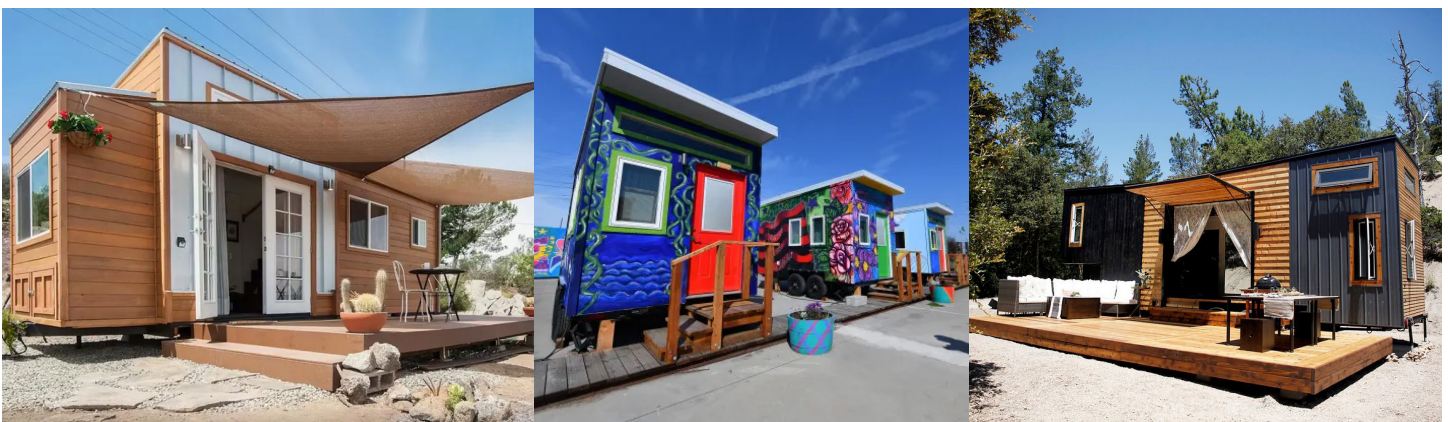
	Terminology	Administrative	Utility Hookups Required	Location/ Massing/ Setbacks	Pad/ Foundation	Size	Screening/ Design	How Many Are Permitted
Oakland, CA	"Vehicular Residential Facilities"	Must meet ANSI standards	Water Sewer Electrical	Applicable zone district density and height standards apply	Must be on asphalt, concrete, pavers, decomposed granite, or gravel	Less than 400 sf.	None	1
Placer County, CA	"Tiny house on wheels"	Tiny house on wheels independent living quarters, registered with the California DMV	Water Sewer Electrical	Applicable zone district height, setbacks, and lot coverage apply	Must be on a permanent foundation	Less than 400 sf.	Designed to look like a conventional building. Skirting required to hide wheels	0
Los Angeles, CA	"Movable Tiny House"	\$150 application fee + a fee for plumbing and electrical inspections. Must be registered with the CA DMV, certified to ANSI or NFPA standards.	Water Sewer Electrical	4 ft rear and side setbacks and not located in the front yard. Height limit is 2 stories	Must be on asphalt, concrete, pavers, decomposed granite, or gravel	No smaller than 150 sf. No larger than 430 sf.	Specific design requirements such as the exclusion of certain exterior cladding materials	N/A

Key takeaways from jurisdictions which allow mobile dwellings include:

- Most jurisdictions adopted code allowing mobile dwellings after 2019 and most have seen few or no permit applications, contrasting with larger numbers of ADU applications.
- Pressure around rising housing costs and increasingly visible houselessness prompted adoption
- Most cities do not have design or screening requirements for mobile dwellings
- Most cities require water, sewer, and electricity hookups for mobile dwellings
- Most cities use utility hookups to satisfy permitting and tracking requirements, though some cities require more complex discretionary review by staff
- Many cities require mobile dwellings to conform to park-model RV standards
- No previously enacted codes have received negative public feedback post-adoption

While people already use mobile dwellings as interim housing options, jurisdictions that adopted code legalizing mobile dwellings have not seen many applications. Why is this the case?

The required utility hookups and pad in many jurisdictions can represent costs upwards of \$15,000, a significant up-front cost for many homeowners. People currently living in mobile dwellings or who are interested in siting a mobile dwelling on their property may find some of the regulatory barriers difficult to navigate and expensive. Additionally, the affordable and interim nature of mobile dwellings means they are not an investment as reflected in the appraisal value of a property and cannot be easily financed. Despite these barriers, as housing costs rise and mobile dwellings become a more attractive option, jurisdictions should create accessible ways to safely and inexpensively permit mobile dwellings.



Photos: Zen Cottages, Juan Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group, Megan Cahn/Cup of Jo

Regulatory Options

Mobile dwellings are unregulated by state and local planning agencies and national and state building codes. In Oregon, a regular dwelling unit is: “a single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, cooking, eating, and sanitation.”²⁶ A mobile dwelling is not considered a dwelling unit in Oregon because it does not meet these state requirements.

The practical way of installing a mobile dwelling is for the property owner to follow the directions of the permitting process approved by the jurisdiction. This might include installing or siting a pad approved by the public works department in addition to meeting utility requirements. At this point, the property owner can wheel in a mobile dwelling and attach it to the required hookups.

Different jurisdictions allow mobile dwellings with various regulations. Across the jurisdictions Small Wins Planning researched, the most common requirement mandated the property owner provide hookups for sewer, potable water, and electricity and represent a significant portion of the overall cost.

Park Model RVs:

Park model RVs are titled by a State DMV, and meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A119.5 standards. These standards cover fuel systems, fire and life safety, plumbing systems and construction requirements. Some cities require mobile dwellings to meet park model RV standards and be certified by inspectors. Certification for RVs is generally done by RV manufacturers, and it can be difficult to certify self-built mobile dwellings.

Figure 7. Mobile Dwelling Utility Hookup Example

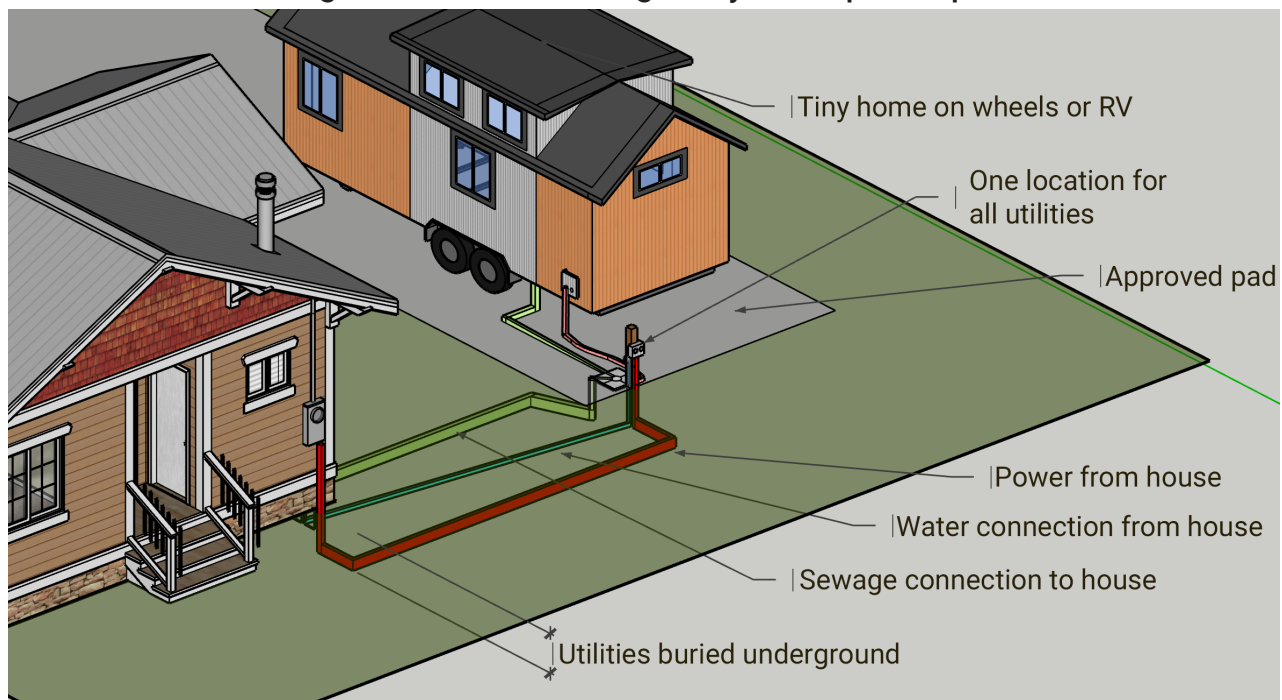


Illustration: Small Wins Planning

In some cases, a mobile dwelling may have a self-contained toilet, independent power generation, or independent water collection and retainment; such mobile dwellings do not need all of the hookups that may be required. Utility hookup exemption in code can reduce overall costs as the property owner can save money by only providing required hookups.

In general, less regulation encourages more development of mobile dwellings. It is very likely that the following considerations will come up when discussing mobile dwellings with community members and decision makers, and the Small Wins Planning team encourages an approach that is less restrictive. If jurisdictions are concerned about passing a less-restrictive code, there are several more restrictive options that decision makers might consider.

Less Restrictive Approach

- No additional parking requirements for mobile dwellings
- Allow mobile dwellings in driveways, side yards, and within existing setbacks
- Waive lot coverage requirements
- No screening or sight-obstruction requirements
- Low barrier application processes with no fees

More Restrictive Approach

- Codify mobile dwellings as Accessory Dwelling Units and thereby require ties to a foundation
- Require mobile dwellings to meet park-model RV (ANSI) standards.
- Require all permanent utility connections (water, sewage, and electricity) for mobile dwellings
- Require screening and/or fencing
- Require standards such as architectural consistency with the primary dwelling or other specific design requirements
- Require separate parking for mobile dwellings

“Keep the code at the same level of simplicity in which it will be reviewed, ensure the code has enough teeth so planners and staff have clear, objective, and enforceable parameters and be mindful of existing zoning code definitions which may require additional code editing for congruency.”

- Robin Scholetzky, AICP

Principal, UrbanLens Planning in Portland, Oregon
Adjunct professor, Toulan School of Urban Studies, Portland State University
Land use planning and housing resource for PSU Small Wins Planning team

Definitions

Several new definitions may need to be introduced into the code if adopting mobile dwellings in a jurisdiction. The following definitions are adoption ready, but should be changed to fit into any existing definitions that are similar in scope in the jurisdiction's definitions.

Mobile Dwelling

Mobile Dwellings are habitable spaces on wheels that provide the basic requirements for shelter and are considered to be interim housing. Mobile Dwellings can be with or without motive power, designed for sport or recreational use, or designed for human occupancy on an intermittent basis. Mobile Dwellings are permitted in the residential zones.

Habitable Space

A space in a residential home, accessory structure, Recreational Vehicle, or Tiny Home on Wheels used for living, sleeping, eating, or cooking. Habitable spaces are considered interim housing. Bathrooms, toilet rooms, closets, halls, storage or utility spaces and similar areas are not considered habitable spaces.

Tiny Home on Wheels (THOW)

A Tiny Home on Wheels is an independent habitable space that is separate from the main residential structure which includes basic and functional areas and facilities used for shelter, heating, cooking, and sanitation. A Tiny Home on Wheels is mounted on a wheeled trailer chassis and is not considered a legal dwelling unit.

Recreational Vehicle (RV)

A Recreational Vehicle is a vehicle with or without motive power, which is designed for sport or recreational use, or which is designed for human occupancy on an intermittent basis. Recreational vehicle might be further divided into two categories as follows:

- Motor home, which includes motorized vehicles designed for human occupancy on an intermittent basis. A camper is considered a motor home when it is on the back of a pick-up or truck. Motor homes are regulated as trucks unless the regulations specifically indicate otherwise.
- Accessory recreational vehicles include non-motorized vehicles designed for human occupancy on an intermittent basis such as vacation trailers and fifth-wheel trailers. A camper is considered an accessory recreational vehicle when it is standing alone. Accessory recreational vehicles also include vehicles designed for off-road use such as off-road vehicles, dune buggies, and recreational boats.

Model Code

Small Wins Planning has developed the following adoption-ready model code. This code was developed with maximum flexibility to assist planning staff in their efforts to enact it.

Section _____ Mobile Dwellings

XXX.010 Purpose.

The purpose of allowing Mobile Dwellings is to:

- A. Provide community members with additional housing opportunities and a means of obtaining emergency shelter, companionship, or rental income, from tenants or family members in either the Mobile Dwellings, or the principal unit.
- B. Increase the number of affordable habitable spaces to the existing housing supply and increase the housing choices available in the City.
- C. Make habitable spaces available to people who might otherwise have difficulty finding homes within the City or for people whose preferred living space includes Mobile Dwellings.
- D. Encourage the development of habitable spaces in residential neighborhoods that are appropriate for people at a variety of stages in the life cycle.

XXX.020 Requirements for all Mobile Dwellings.

Mobile Dwellings shall conform to the following standards:

- A. *Applicability.* Mobile Dwellings are permitted in zones for residential uses, and are not a building, structure or dwelling unit. Because a Mobile Dwelling is not a dwelling unit, building or structure it does not count toward minimum or maximum density or FAR. Mobile Dwellings are not subject to development standards that apply to buildings or structures.
- B. *Placement.* A Mobile Dwelling shall be placed on a pad in accordance with the [applicable City parking and/pr storage] standards. A Mobile Dwelling shall not be placed in the public right of way.
- C. *Utility Hookups.* A Mobile Dwelling shall have utility hookups available for use provided by the property owner.
 - 1. *All utilities* to the Mobile Dwelling shall be buried underground and be permitted by the review authority.
 - 2. *Electrical* connections must be made through a dedicated outlet on a service pedestal or on a dwelling unit, which must be a minimum 20-amp, GFCI-protected, dedicated circuit.
 - 3. *Plumbing.* Both potable water and connection to wastewater/sewage facilities shall be provided by the property owner for a Mobile Dwelling.

- i. Potable water shall be connected to a potable water source in conformance with applicable state plumbing codes and shall be connected using a potable water hose,
 - ii. Wastewater plumbing infrastructure shall connect from the Mobile Dwelling into a residential wastewater/sewage line. All plumbing installations or extensions shall be in conformance with the applicable state plumbing code and be permitted by the review authority.
4. *Exceptions.* Exceptions are allowed for required utilities as outline above in the following scenarios:
- i. Electrical connections from a dedicated outlet on a service pedestal or on a dwelling unit are not required if sufficient alternative electrical sources are present for the Mobile Dwelling.
 - ii. Potable water connections are not required if the Mobile Dwelling does not have any fixtures that require potable water and the occupants have access to potable water on the property.
 - iii. Wastewater/sewage infrastructure connections are not required to be provided if there is no toilet in the Mobile Dwelling or if a DEQ-approved gray water disposal system is present in the Mobile Dwelling. If the Mobile Dwelling does not have internal plumbing, the occupants must have access to potable water, toilets and showers in the primary house.
- D. *Separation Distance.* A Mobile Dwelling shall maintain a 6ft separation distance from any existing dwelling unit.
- E. *Upkeep.* A Mobile Dwelling shall comply with the existing requirements to satisfy reasonable property maintenance and upkeep.
- F. *Procedures.* Where permitted, Mobile Dwellings are subject to review and approval through clear and objective standards.

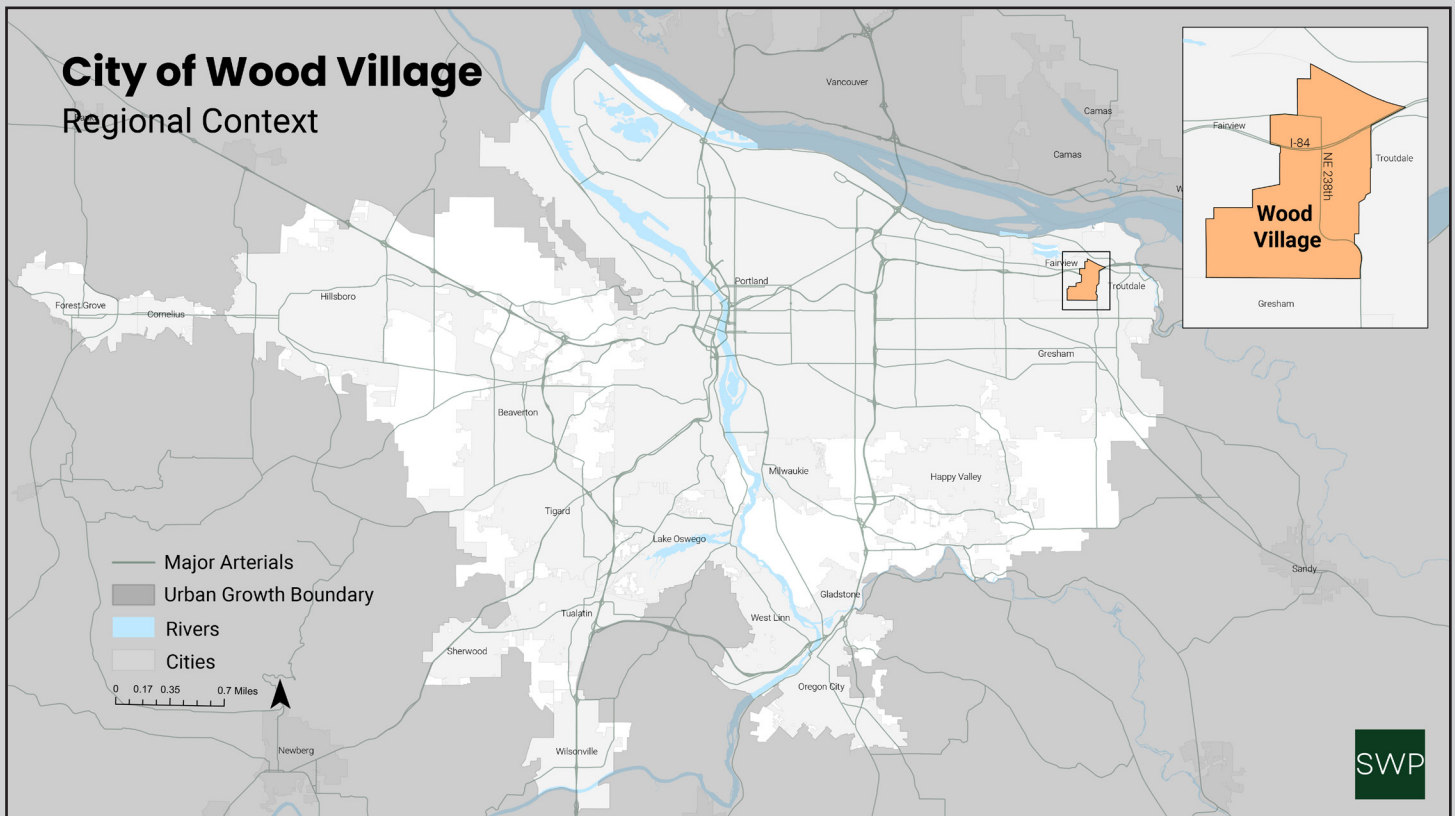
This report and model code does not address all of the ways of incorporating mobile dwellings into communities, some of which include:

- Intermittent emergency use to limit the number of days permitted, or until an emergency declaration has been rescinded
- Clusters of mobile dwellings that allow for more than one mobile dwelling on a given property
- Mobile dwelling clusters for short term rental use
- Using publicly owned lands or partnerships with developers who own vacant or underutilized land to provide small pod mobile dwelling villages for individuals who would otherwise be unsheltered

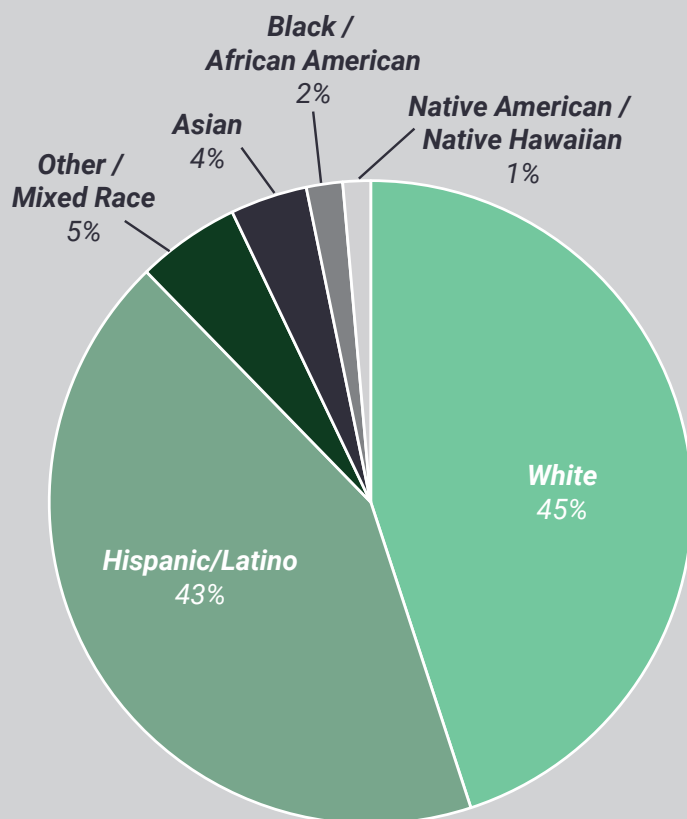
5. Wood Village Case Study

Land Acknowledgment

The Chinookan peoples known as the Clackamas and Cascades are the indigenous people of the land now inhabited by the city of Wood Village and other areas of the Columbia River. The village of Nechacokee (now referred to as Nichagwli – “nee chalk lee”) was located near today’s Blue Lake Park. Ancestral life of these peoples included a seasonal round of resource gathering and stewardship from the wapato fields and fishing areas of the Columbia River to the cedar and huckleberry gathering areas of the high Cascades. Introduced disease from early settlers dramatically reduced the number of these people. They signed the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 with the United States government and were forcibly removed to the Grand Ronde Indian Reservation. We thank the descendants of these Tribes for being the original stewards and protectors of these lands since time immemorial. We also acknowledge the systemic policies of genocide, relocation and assimilation that still impact many Indigenous/Native families today. We are honored by the collective work of many Native nations, leaders and families who are demonstrating resilience, resistance, revitalization, healing and creativity. We are honored to be guests upon these lands.



Located at the western edge of the Columbia River Gorge and near the eastern edge of the Portland Metro Urban Growth Boundary, Wood Village is a geographically small yet diverse community. Along with Fairview, Troutdale and Gresham, Wood Village belongs to what is referred to as East County. These jurisdictions often share resources and engage in joint development initiatives distinct from the rest of Multnomah County. Wood Village has a rich history, first as home to some of the Chinook peoples and later as a company town housing workers for the Reynolds Aluminum factory during World War II. Officially incorporated in 1951, Wood Villagers proudly say that their small city “has everything you need in one square mile.”

Fast Facts²⁷

Wood Village is a **DIVERSE** community with a population of **4,387** people

INCOMES are below statewide averages

\$67,058 - Oregon Median Household Income

\$56,905 - Wood Village Median Household Income

The **POVERTY RATE** is similar to the statewide average, at **4%**

32%

of Wood Village homes are **owner-occupied**

67%

of Wood Village homes are **renter-occupied**



Wood Village rents have increased

24%

in the last 10 years.
Current median rent is

\$1,215



Multi-unit vacancy rates have dropped from

12% to 2%

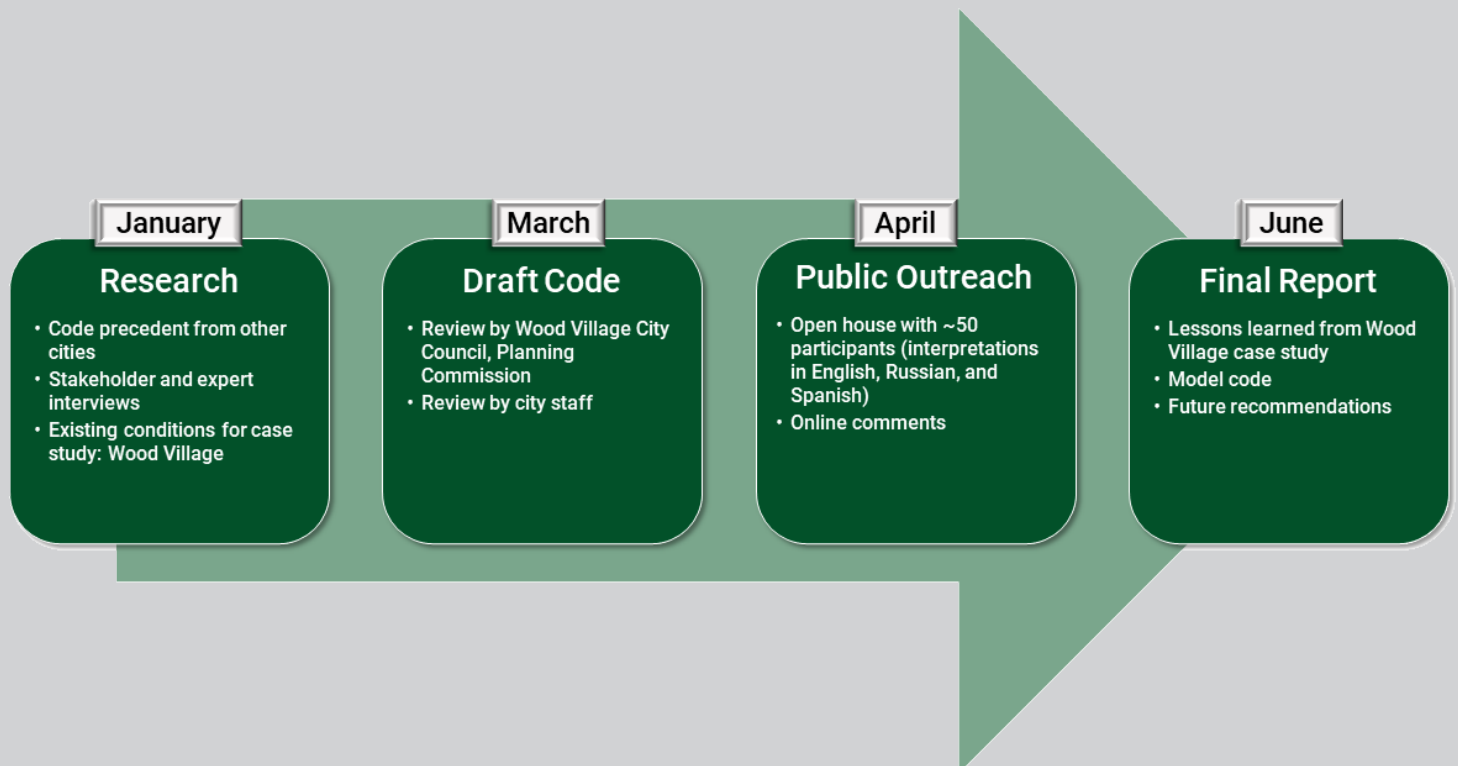
in the last several years in Wood Village

Additional Housing Choices Code Update Project

The Wood Village City Council established permitting RVs and THOWs as a council priority in the 2021/22 Annual Performance Plan. The Wood Village city manager submitted a proposal for the Additional Housing Choices Code Update to the Portland State University (PSU) Masters of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) workshop program in December 2021. It was selected by Small Wins Planning as their workshop project in January 2022.

Small Wins Planning drafted a scope of work with the City of Wood Village and acted as planning consultant. The deliverables produced by Small Wins Planning include:

- **Wood Village area profile** with history, demographics, economic profile, and existing housing analysis
- Research of **code from other jurisdictions**
- **Expert and stakeholder interviews**
- **Reports** summarizing key findings from public input and research
- **Engagement materials** for a public open house to incorporate public input per the recommendation of Wood Village City Council
- Drafted, workshopped, and refined **RV/THOW municipal code** for recommendation and adoption by the City of Wood Village City Council and Planning Commission



What Happened

City Council and Planning Commission Hearing

The Wood Village City Council directed staff to address mobile dwelling code as a part of the annual city performance plan. Small Wins Planning presented to the Planning Commission and City Council in a joint session in late March 2022. The presentation included findings related to mobile dwellings and the opportunity they provide for more affordable housing options. Small Wins Planning discussed different possibilities for implementation and asked for feedback.

Elements of code and relevant research presented include:

- Requiring permitted electrical, plumbing and water hookups for mobile dwellings, providing the basis for tracking
- Requiring a gravel pad for the mobile dwelling
- Mobile dwelling siting requirements
- Applicable zones where mobile dwellings should be allowed and corresponding demographics (light residential zoned properties generally possess the square footage necessary for backyard mobile dwellings, these zones are primarily occupied by white residents)
- Lessons learned from other jurisdictions. Most jurisdictions adopted code since 2019. Since adoption, few have seen permit applications. Small Wins Planning suggested less restrictive code could lower barriers to implementation

Some council members indicated hesitation toward adopting any code, let alone a more permissive code. It was difficult to adequately explain the complexities of this code development within the time constraints of the Wood Village city council meeting schedule. The City Council was interested in getting direction from the public as well as more data from other municipalities that had adopted code allowing for mobile dwellings.



Photo: MetroEast Community Media

Open House

Figure 8. Small Wins Planning Open House Materials

What Will The Updated Zoning Code Allow?

The new program would allow Tiny Homes on Wheels and RVs:

- in **RESIDENTIAL** areas
- on a **PAD**
- on **WHEELS**
- **BEHIND** the front of the house
- with required **HOOKUPS** for water, sewer, and electricity

Residential 7.5 Zone

City of Wood Village Light Residential Zoning

What Will the Updated Zoning Code NOT Allow?

The new program would not allow:

- **MULTIPLE** RVs or Tiny Homes on Wheels
- Tiny Homes on Wheels or RVs on the **STREET or SIDEWALK**
- **BROKEN DOWN OR DANGEROUS** RVs
- **SEWAGE DUMPING** in the street
- RVs or Tiny Homes on Wheels in required **PARKING** spaces

Small Wins Planning conducted an open house in mid-May, several weeks after the first joint Planning Commission and City Council meeting. Small Wins Planning designed a series of boards to educate the public on mobile dwellings and how they might fit into the community. The materials created described the code options under consideration and the factors that make mobile dwellings a unique opportunity to provide more housing affordability and flexibility in Wood Village. General feedback was solicited on questions, concerns, and potential benefits of allowing this housing type. The City translated each of the boards into Spanish and Russian, the two most common languages spoken in Wood Village after English. At the open house, Wood Village provided refreshments and interpretation services.

Three days prior to the open house, an anonymous resident created, printed, and distributed to all Wood Village residents a flier opposed to the proposed code changes. The flier described that the proposed code changes “could be devastating to property values”, create “parking problems,” and “not help the housing problem” or “reduce homelessness.” An email template provided allowed residents to express their dissent to elected officials. This messaging created acute fear and anger towards the project, and resulted in heavy opposition at the open house.

Figure 9. Anonymous Opposition Flier

TELL YOUR CITY LEADERS THAT YOU DON'T WANT RV'S AND TINY HOMES ON WHEELS LIVING ALLOWED IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

The City of Wood Village is seriously and enthusiastically entertaining the idea of allowing RV's and tiny homes on wheels to be lived in on residential lots.

The City of Wood Village has partnered with Small Wins Planning (SWP), a Portland State University Master of Urban and Regional Planning graduate workshop project consisting of five graduate students, to draft and revise a code enabling living in tiny homes and recreational vehicles.

Portland's City Council voted to approve a similar zoning change this April. We don't need more of the problems Portland faces in our city.

We have a great community where it's mostly clean, safe, stable, & we love our neighbors. Help maintain that! Voice your thoughts, concerns and desires to our Wood Village city councilors & mayor so they know how to vote for you!

Can't I just vote against this?

No. This is an action that will be voted upon by your city council. They need to know how their city feels about this so they vote appropriately. Email them below to let them know!

Will there be standards for the type of habitat?

Yes, kind of. Current city code will be cited as the standard for appearance. Other standards could also be asked for of course. Note that any standards or code made will also need to be proven if not to compliance, and then enforced. This may be very difficult. At the meetings they will likely show nice \$100,000 airstreams and tiny home builds - The reality in the most

Woodville this help our housing problem overall and reduce homelessness?

Probably not. During testimony against this idea in Portland, Dr. Maria Zapata, the director of Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative and an associate professor of land use planning, said she was doubtful that the tiny homes on wheels and RVs soon to be legislated as housing options by the code change would effectively tackle the city's affordable housing crisis.

Is this the same as House Bill 2001 that changes the residential zoning codes?

No. This is a completely separate concept that Wood Village is considering. The public meeting that Wood Village is holding is also about HB2001, which may be confusing to some. HB2001 is a highly criticized state passed bill that effectively changed all single family residential to allow duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and cottage clusters. This bill is not negotiable at the city level, however is being talked about at the same time as the RV & tiny home code update that the City of Wood Village is entertaining and our city council will be voting on.

EMAIL YOUR CITY COUNCIL!

Scan this QR Code to email them all with a premade message. PLEASE, sign your name and address at the bottom so they know whom it is from and that you are a real resident! Also, your own message or thoughts are highly encouraged! Please type away!

COME TO THE MEETING & SPEAK IN PERSON!

TOWHVRV Open House
Monday, April 25th
6:00pm - 7:30pm

City Council Meeting
Tuesday, April 26th
6:00pm

Small Wins Planning estimated 40-50 people in attendance at the open house. There were at least five Russian speaking people and at least two Spanish speaking people. Most of the participants were older, white, and indicated they were homeowners. Additionally, many recounted having lived in Wood Village for many years.

Many people attended as a result of the anonymous opposition flier. They expressed concern directly related to the messaging in the flier. Small Wins Planning engaged in a variety of conversations with the attendees and while some remained in opposition at the end of the open house, many attendees felt assuaged by the presentation of materials and accurate information Small Wins Planning provided about the proposed code.

Common concerns included:

- Fears that mobile dwellings “welcomes houseless people from Portland” to “set up camp” in Wood Village
- Fears of reduced parking and property values
- Fears of the disruption of “neighborhood character”
- Fears of increased crime



Photos: Small Wins Planning

“It’s important to never underestimate the power of grass roots community efforts. The best laid plans can be turned on its head which can result in spending more time doing damage control than positive engagement or policy shaping.

“The idea of enabling tiny homes is not new, and yet so few communities have regulations in place that it makes it hard not to be considered a test case. In a world where more people want data driven results and decisions, it seems that no one wants to be a test case.”

- Greg Dirks
Wood Village City Manager

Communicating technical aspects of the code to the public proved challenging, particularly when the anonymous opposition flier influenced public perception of the proposed code. Many attendees left the open house less worried about the proposed code, but the flier was effective in framing the narrative based upon spurious fears. Many residents did not know that homeowners will apply for permits and choose tenants for the mobile dwelling, which led some residents to incorrectly believe they would have no control over mobile dwellings on their property. Public backlash leaves the future of the proposed code uncertain.

Wood Village still has the chance to be an early adopter of mobile dwelling code and provide an example for other cities in the region. At the time of this report's publishing, Wood Village City Council has not yet adopted the mobile dwelling code update.



Photo: Small Wins Planning

“What matters most is finding ways to construct homes more cheaply. Apartments and plexes reduce the cost of land per home. Group homes reduce the cost of kitchens per home. Manufactured shelters like campers and tiny homes reduce the cost of, well, shelter. Those options are all good. They all bring new residences within reach of more people, and they all bring more residences within reach of people with the least money. [...] All these half-measures to higher-quality housing deserve to be legalized, with reasonable regulations to avoid causing direct harm to others, and welcomed into cities and neighborhoods.”

- Michael Anderson

Michael Anderson is a senior housing researcher and transportation lead at the Sightline Institute, an independent nonprofit research and communications center.

Lessons Learned

This experience in Wood Village provided a robust illustration of the challenges involved in creating and implementing progressive housing code updates in the face of community members' and elected officials' fear around houselessness in general and RVs in particular. This project speaks to the importance of understanding the motivations and perspectives of both elected leaders and vocal coalitions of residents. Meaningful engagement takes time and resources. A six-month timeline was insufficient to present alternatives at the first Planning Commission and City Council meeting, engage with the public, revise alternatives, and present to the Planning Commission and City Council. Initially keen to work within our timeline, the project has now extended beyond the scope of our workshop project and its future is uncertain. Here are some key takeaways from the process:

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IS FLAWED

Traditional public engagement processes, based on public meetings and forums, typically elicit responses from only the most vocal opponents of a policy or program, and our project was no exception. Educating the wider public on zoning and municipal code issues is difficult through these avenues.

BUILDING COALITIONS IS CRUCIAL

A great deal time and energy is required for residents to participate in the zoning amendment process. Teaching the public to interpret technical language and concepts takes time that many municipal governments and residents don't have. Building a coalition of interested and supportive community members through focus groups, tabling, and outreach to local advocates may be a more effective way to engage the public and generate support than through newsletters and open house events.

GET AHEAD OF THE MESSAGING

Begin to shape the narrative about what the code is meant to accomplish early in the process. Mobile dwellings can elicit strong emotions from the public. Providing accurate and accessible information can help to alleviate strong negative reactions. It can also generate more productive discussions with the public and policymakers.

CLEARLY SCOPE THE PROJECT FOR THE COMMUNITY

Staff designed the process to run parallel with the state-mandated HB2001 code update. This was done in the hopes that combining efforts could achieve a positive synergy towards additional housing options. Instead, combining separate initiatives resulted in confusion and conflation of mandated versus optional code changes. This approach also allowed vocal opponents to frame the issue and mischaracterize the code content, enflaming public opinion and stoking opposition. Planners should carefully consider how projects are framed for the public.

What's Next for Mobile Dwellings?

Lack of public awareness is one of the key factors limiting implementation of mobile dwellings. A necessary initial step for advocates and planners must be to increase awareness of mobile dwellings and the benefits they offer. It will take time for mobile dwellings to gain widespread awareness similar to the recognition ADUs and “missing middle” housing have achieved in recent years, but doing so will make adoption of code changes and summoning political will for policy solutions more feasible. Additionally, as this experience in Wood Village demonstrated, local adoption presents many challenges. Statewide legislation supporting mobile dwellings may be necessary to facilitate success for mobile dwellings at the local/city level.

To this end, Small Wins Planning suggests the State of Oregon create a new permissible housing category within the Oregon Administrative Rules called “Mobile Dwellings.” These dwellings should be permitted subject to clear and objective standards. The state should also provide model code for local jurisdictions to adopt and adapt, and explore ways to integrate mobile dwellings into residential neighborhoods, including allowing mobile dwelling clusters and mobile dwellings as additional or primary units on residential lots. For a more thorough explanation of statewide legislative options, see the Mobile Dwellings Policy Work Group’s January 2022 report, *Mobile Dwellings in Oregon: Legislative Opportunities for Interim Housing*, available at www.buildinganadu.com.²⁹

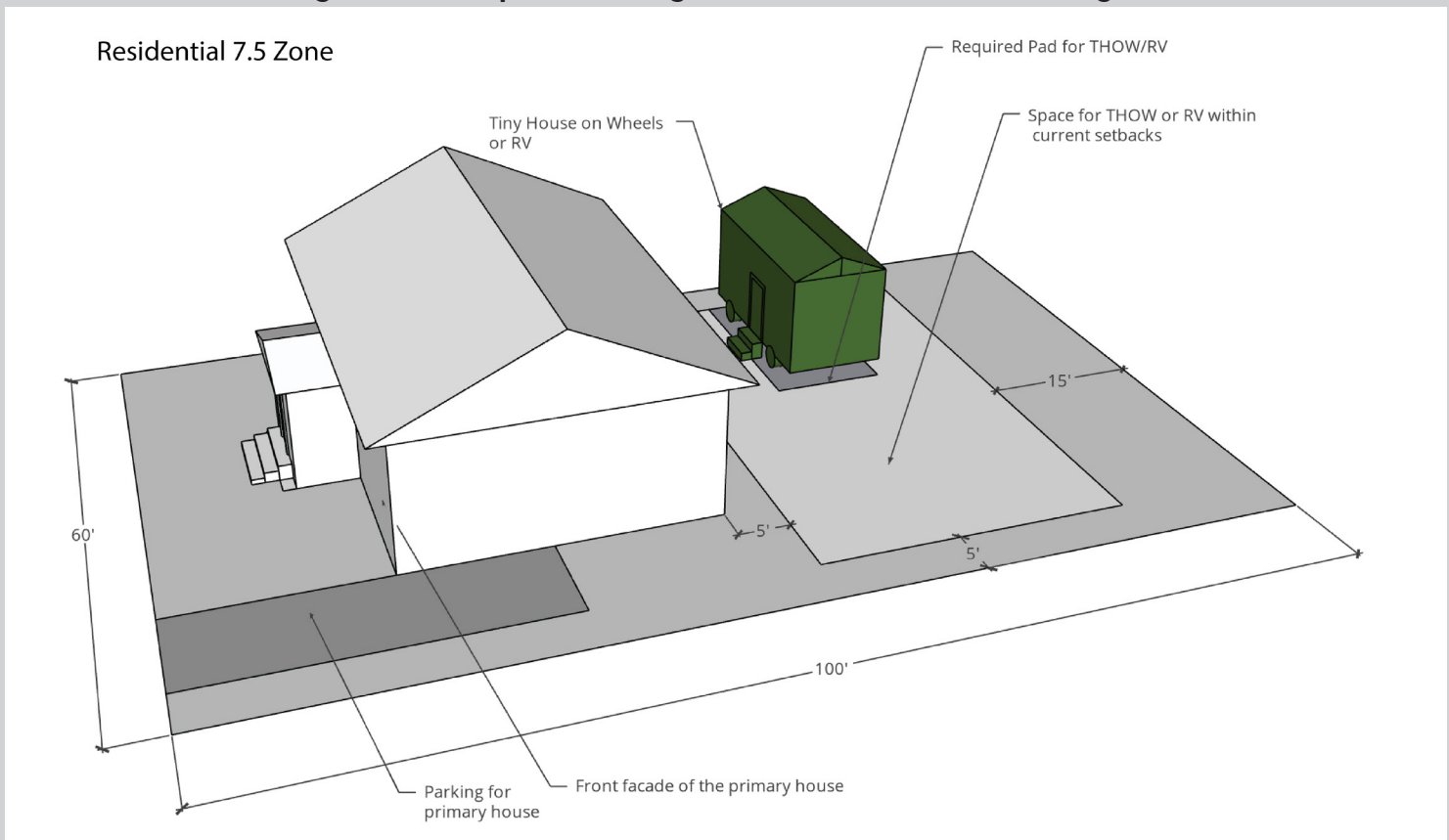


Additionally, Small Wins Planning suggests the state of Oregon should create a statewide mobile dwelling aid and assistance program. Similar programs for ADUs incorporate both equity/loan assistance components and technical assistance, in the form of project management, simplified permitting processes, or help with tenant referrals.³⁰ There is already precedent for such a system in Oregon. In the 2021 session of the Oregon legislature, lawmakers passed HB 3335 which earmarked \$1,000,000 for Hacienda CDC to expand their Small Homes Northwest community ADU demonstration project.³¹ This project helps income eligible homeowners develop ADUs in neighborhoods at risk of gentrification, it also helps develop ADUs for rent by income-eligible tenants.³² Designing the system this way helps meet complementary goals of helping lower-income home-owners produce income from their properties, and providing extremely low-income housing with subsidy. Expanding this program to include mobile dwellings would offer more housing options to choose from and more flexibility for homeowners with smaller lots, different needs, and varying budgets.

Concluding Remarks

Until we enact meaningful policies that allow for more accessible and affordable housing options, we will not address growing housing crises. Failing to do so ultimately undermines confidence in local and regional governance, which further undermines coordinated and equitable responses to regional issues. It is important to consider that people are already living in mobile dwellings due to rising housing costs and a lack of options. As planners, it is crucial to respond to these trends with policies and actions that enable more equitable, sustainable and stable communities. We can take proactive steps to help our communities reach these goals, we need only to muster the political and moral courage to do so. We hope this guide provides a useful template for local planners to implement some of these changes in their communities.

Figure 10. Proposed Siting of THOW/RV in Wood Village



6. Small Wins Planning

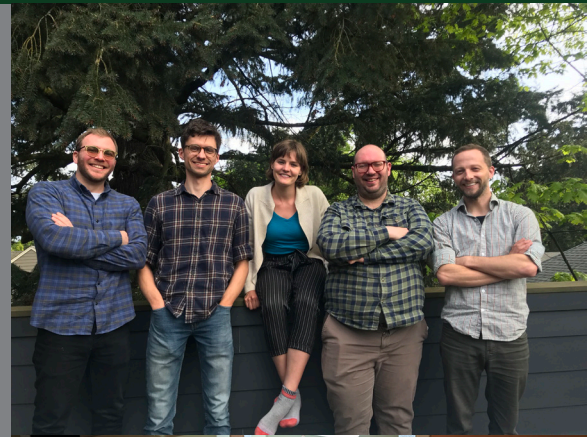
29

A “small win” can be defined as “a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance. By itself, one small win may seem unimportant. A series of wins at small but significant tasks, however, reveals a pattern that may attract allies, deter opponents, and lower resistance to subsequent proposals.”³³ We call ourselves Small Wins Planning because we believe that regular, small and incremental changes are the most effective means to create more lasting, sustainable, equitable, and just communities.

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